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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000455

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SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN LAGOS

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SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Permanent Secretary of Lagos State Ministry of Environment Dr. Titi Anibaba told Embassy Accra-based REO and PolOff on November 16 that despite significant success with respect to "greening" Lagos and reducing traffic congestion caused by illegal activities, Lagos faces significant environmental challenges particularly with regard to waste management and coastal erosion. Anibaba also outlined Lagos State initiatives to confront the impact of climate change, and noted that there did not seem to be any natural brakes on Lagos' annual population growth of three percent, due largely to migration. Lagos State appears to be taking its many environmental challenges seriously, but it is not yet clear whether it will develop and implement a comprehensive action plan to tackle these problems effectively. END SUMMARY

GREENING OF LAGOS WORKING

12. (SBU) Permanent Secretary of the Lagos State Ministry of Environment Dr. Titi Anibaba told Regional Environmental Officer and ConGen Lagos Poloff on November 16 that Lagos has been successful in its efforts to create parks and plant trees along roads and on medians. Anibaba claimed that 1,500 unemployed youths and "miscreants," who had previously made certain areas of the city unsafe, had been involved in developing the environmental projects and were now employed as gardeners and caretakers. Lagos is now a safer and healthier place for its residents as a result of this initiative, Anibaba said, adding that it had improved the quality of life for all inhabitants. She noted, however, that Lagos needed assistance in identifying which species of plants could survive best in an urban environment because many of the trees planted along roadsides had died in the exhaust fumes of Lagos' congested traffic. She added that Lagos could also use assistance in obtaining software for landscape design to enable even more sophisticated landscape planning. Last but not least, Anibaba pointed out that the Lagos State Ministry of Environment does not have jurisdiction over the waterways and shoreline (which are subject to federal authorities), yet these places are where some of the most obvious litter undermines state efforts to create a more attractive and cleaner environment in Lagos.

ZERO TOLERANCE FOR STREET VENDORS

13. (SBU) Anibaba explained that Lagos State has implemented a policy of "Zero Tolerance" with respect to street vendors and the construction of shops and shanties along roads in order to reduce traffic congestion, pollution and crime. Anibaba said roughly 1,000 people were employed in the enforcement of these laws, warning violators of impending action and giving them the chance to cease and desist before the authorities take action to remove obstructions. Lagos has swept away hundreds of illegally constructed shop stalls offering a variety of products and services. According to Anibaba, the effect of these measures has been a decrease in solid waste, fewer clogged drains and less crime. (NOTE: Fulbright Scholar Sean Basinski challenged Lagos State assumptions about the impact of the "zero tolerance" policy at a public presentation in Lagos on July 16. According to Basinski 70 per cent of Lagos residents live from the informal economy manifested in illegal shanties and street vending and the "typical" vendor is a woman supporting several children, not a youth who is otherwise engaged in crime and vandalism as alleged by State officials. Basinski questions where these people are to earn an honest living if they are forced off the streets, noting that the shop space offered them by the Lagos State government is neither affordable nor in commercially competitive locations. END NOTE.)

WASTE MANAGEMENT INADEQUATE

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14. (SBU) Anibaba admitted that Lagos currently has no land-fills, only dump sites, adding that despite development of a state-of-the-art dump site due to open next year, this new site will meet only one tenth of Lagos' demand for the disposal of solid waste. Liquid waste management is even more inadequate with no public water treatment plant currently in operation. Anibaba estimated that Lagos needed five water treatment plants. She noted that in addition to sewage, industrial waste is still disposed of without treatment because of inadequate enforcement of existing environmental laws.

COASTAL EROSION POSES SERIOUS THREAT

15. (SBU) Coastal erosion has been a serious problem in Lagos for a long time and, according to Dr. Larry Awosika of the Nigerian Institute of Oceanographic and Marine Research (NIOMR), first began when the British constructed moles to protect the harbor in 1908-1912. NIOMR claims that the situation is aggravated by the lack of comprehensive, long-term planning and accuses the Lagos State government of reacting with ad-hoc, local measures that often create new problems later in nearby areas. The situation appears to be getting worse, and rising sea levels caused by global warming could make the situation critical. More research is needed to document, quantify and analyze the impact of coastal erosion according to NIOMR officials.

EDUCATING LAGOSIANS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

16. (SBU) The Lagos State Government is keen to educate its population about Climate Change. Lagos held a "Maiden Summit on Climate Change" in March to draw attention to the threat posed by climate change, and an "Action Plan" is currently under development which will be presented at the next summit,

scheduled for March 2010. The state has also produced a film entitled "If Only" and a children's book which highlights actions individuals can take to improve their environment. Anibaba claimed that roughly half or about 500 of Lagos' schools have established climate change clubs, each with between 20 and 30 members, and explained that the state has also launched the "Me and My Tree" initiative which gives children a seedling to plant, and by monitoring the tree's growth, encourages them to nurture, value and appreciate nature.

ALARMING GROWTH RATES

17. (SBU) Lagos is currently a city with an estimated 18 million inhabitants and growing at a rate of three per cent per year, according to Anibaba. Growth is largely a function of migration into the state by Nigerians seeking economic opportunities. There appears to be no natural inhibitor to further growth, she noted, although the infrastructure of the city, such as it is, is already over-burdened.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Lagos State faces immense environmental challenges. Solid waste management is in its infancy, while liquid waste management and air pollution controls are non-existent. Coastal erosion is already a serious problem, and rising sea levels will make storm surges, already a great hazard, more frequent and more destructive. Lagos State appears to take the problem of climate change seriously, but it is too early to tell if it will develop and implement a comprehensive action plan capable of addressing the myriad of problems facing the city. On certain issues, such as waste management and greening initiatives, the state environmental officials could benefit from technical assistance by the international donor community.

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19. (U) ConGen Lagos coordinated this telegram with REO and Embassy Abuja.
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